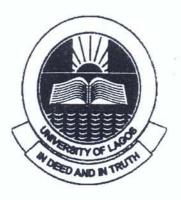


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The Role of Industrial Social Workers in Integrating People with Physical Challenges in the Work Place

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Abstract

There is a misconception and belief by employers that persons with disabilities can be regular absentees at work, non-productive and not suitable for employment. The result is seeing persons with disabilities that are gainfully employed at workplace as 'strangers in the foreign land', whereas some of these physically challenged persons may be willing to work efficiently and effectively if given the opportunity to actively participate in the labour force rather than been excluded. This study, therefore, examined job commitment, adequacy of job performance, and/or otherwise of absenteeism of persons with disabilities from the point of view of employers and supervisors to whom they are responsible. The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type was used for the study. The population consists of all employees in the selected workplaces in Oyo State, Nigeria namely: Oyo State Civil Service, Federal Secretariat, Ibadan, University of Ibadan and Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. The staff of the establishments were clustered into the able-bodied and the physically-challenged. The total number of the physically challenged from the four establishments was 175, and a random sampling technique was used to select 275 non-physically challenged employees from where a physically challenged person is selected. The supervisors of chosen samples (75 in number) were then contacted to respond to the questionnaires that elicit information about the 450 employees. A questionnaire tagged "Employees' Workplace Performance, Commitment and Attendance Questionnaire" at 0.05 level of significance was utilized to elicit response. The findings showed there is no significant difference in the work performance, job commitment

and absentee rates of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace.

Based on these findings and for full integration of persons with disabilities into the workplace, employers, through their services and involvement of industrial social workers, should work on job designs, access to the workplace, work area design and give proper training and orientation to both the disabled and non-disabled persons at the workplace. Also, there is the need to put in place flexible workplace practices that are peculiar and advantageous to the persons with disabilities. Full integration of physically challenged into the workplace will not only reduce the cost of maintenance by the family and society but will also reduce the poverty within the economy.

Keywords: Industrial Social Workers, Integrating, People with physical challenges, Work Place

1.0 Introduction

People with disability have traditionally been marginalized in social development discussions. Their issues have been marginalised and categorised as "special" or "different", and the concept of "integration" has been based on changing the individual to conform to society, rather than promoting social change that liberates, empowers and incorporates the experiences of disabled people (Disability Awareness in Action (DAA), 1995).

Disability is simply another dimension of human diversity and it is diverse in nature. According to ILO, (2008), disabled people in developing countries face many barriers such as lack of access to transportation, education, training and essential services, low self-esteem and low expectations arising from their marginalized position and social condition, formal sector jobs are often more scarce and subject to intense competition. Employer preconceptions about lower productivity level of disabled persons frequently mistaken are also a barrier.

Kaletta, Binks and Robinson (2012), stated that many companies in America doubt their abilities to keep Physically Challenged People (PCP) safe on the job and also companies become worry that they might unintentionally create hazards for themselves and other employees hence PCP remain excluded from the workplace despite the passage and existence of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 forbidding discrimination against PCP. They buttress this argument with statistics from the Bureau of Labour Statistics (2012) data for March 2011 that only 21% of people with a disability over age 16 are in labour force as against 69.7% of people without a disability.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in the context of its health experience, defines disability as restriction, or lack (resulting from an impairment) of the ability to perform an activity in the manner, or within the range, considered normal for a human being (DAA, 1995). The term "people with disabilities", "persons with disabilities", "disabled persons", "disabled people", "people living with challenges", "physically challenged people" are used interchangeably with the intent of reflecting accepted usage in different part of the work. In this paper, the writer will use physically challenged people (PCP) more often.

PCP is not a homogeneous group. They may have had a disability from birth, or acquired this in their childhood, teenage years, or later in life, during further education or while in employment. Their disability may have little impact on their ability to work and take part in society, or it may have a major impact, requiring considerable support and assistance (ILO, 2001). Disability in PCP can for a long-term - likely to last for twelve months or more, affect their day-to-day activities, that is involving any of the following: mobility, doing something with one's hands, physical coordination, ability to lift, carry or move everyday objects, speech, hearing or eyesight, memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand, perception of the risk of physical danger (UCL Equalities and Diversity, 2012).

PCP are much more likely than the able-bodied to be hit, injured, bullied and humiliated at work. Carel (2008) noted that research by Equality and Human Rights Commission showed that 11.6% of employees with a disability experience physical violence at work compared with 6.5% of other employees. People with disability were almost twice as likely to believe that their performance at work was unfairly criticised, humiliated or ridiculed.

In African cities, it is painful to notice that physically challenged people are allowed to earn their living by begging. In some cases, families lock physically challenged person up in rooms because of the feeling that they are a form of disgrace or even a curse by evil spirit. This societal discrimination in the area of social, economic and cultural life deprive the disabled the right to employment, participate politically or even express their opinions (Series, 2010).

EHRC (2012) stated that although more than one in five adults are disabled, only half are likely to be in work, compared to four fifths of non disabled adults. Those who are able to secure employment are often not able to realize their full potentials as they do not receive the support they need from employers. This is an indication that disabled people continue to be put at a disadvantage in the workplace.

Accurate figures on a world-wide scale are difficult to collect because many countries have not carried out research and definitions of disability and impairment vary. But according to World Bank (2005), there are 650 million disabled people world-wide with 80 percent living in developing countries. In Europe, 47.8 percent of all people with disability participate in the labour force compared with 71.8 percent of people without a disability (ILO, 2008). Disabled people are among the very poorest in the developing world – 82 percent of disabled people in developing countries live below the poverty line (Hope, 2003); 20 percent of all people living on less than a dollar a day are disabled (World Bank, 2005).

The myth that including persons with disabilities at workplace is employing persons that are unable to work and expensive abound with employers (Marescia, 2003). This is because PCP are frequently not considered potential member of the workforce, therefore, perception, fear, myth and prejudice continue to limit understanding and acceptance of disability in workplaces everywhere. The real obstacle lies with employers who are still hesitant to take on employees with disabilities because they believe they may create problems in the workplace (Marescia, 2003; Chandroo, 2006; Casey, 2003).

In Nigeria, Adamu (2009) stated that more than 19 million PCP exist and that between 75 and 90 percent of them live below poverty line due to years of neglect by the society and especially due to lack of access to paid employment. This misconception about the physically challenged exist in Nigeria is based on the intent that PCP are unwell, unable to work and are people that deserve pity (Anjiode, 2010).

With the aforementioned discussion on fears and myth about the PCP, the questions then are, is there any hope for PCP in the workplace in Nigeria? Are they worthwhile where they work? These and other issues are to be resolved in this paper because unless disabled people are brought into the development mainstream (employment), it will be impossible to cut poverty to half of its present rate by 2015 as required by Millennium Development Goal 1.

Example of Violence and Abuse of Rights of disabled people can be got from lamentations of some PCP as recorded in "better from our lives" that was collated from over 100 countries and reported in DAA (1995) thus:

1. Dan Alexandrus Antoci, (Romania). "I am 22 years old and severely disabled. Till 1990, people in Romania had no idea about the existence of disabled people...; even now we don't know the real number of disabled people. We had only the right to die. Now, we are recognized but we have no possibilities for social integration because of the

existence of architectural barriers, lack of working conditions for disabled people and no access to any public means of transportation. Unfortunately, it is the reality that our rights and laws for disabled people are not respected".

- 2. Abdul Rahrnan Sahak, (Afghanistan). "Disability is not inability; charity is not the solution to our problem. We need equality and our rights as human beings in all sectors of life. Disabled people have much to contribute".
- 3. Mukhtar Abdi Ogle, (Kenya). "The major task of the UN at international level and governments at national level is to eliminate human prejudices and negative stereotypes against disabled people, who are the victims of discriminatory attitudes that militate against their dream of equal opportunities in jobs, education, health and social integration".
- 4. Cosmas I.B. Okoli, (Nigeria). 'Seeing the ragged disabled people begging on the streets of Lagos elicits sympathy from the passers-by.... It is disheartening to know that these so-called unfortunate members of society, who have no choice but to go on the streets to beg, are actually planted by able-bodied people who go to remote villages and lure disabled people to Lagos on the pretext that they want to help them.... Their managers, who live in comfort in posh houses, now organize vendors to supply food to their money-making 'beasts'. These beggars give their daily proceeds to their managers whom they refer to as their 'kings'."

Despite international legal instruments like the ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled persons) Convention (No. 159), 1983; ILO Code of Practice for Managing Disability in the Workplace, 2002.; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (2006) all aimed to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their

inherent dignity, there is the misconception by employers that persons with disabilities are meant to be kept out of the workplace.

From the aforementioned conception, this study aimed at looking at the role of physically challenged people in the workplace if properly integrated through efforts of industrial social workers.

Three researched hypotheses are raised thus and tested.

- Ho 1. There is no significant difference in the performance of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.
- Ho 2. There is no significant difference in the job commitment of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.
- Ho 3. There is no significant difference in the absentee rates of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.

2.0 Methodology

The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type was used to carry out the research. This design is suitable for the study because it aimed at collecting data that are already in existence and the variables involved in the study are not been manipulated by the researcher. The population consists of all employees in the selected workplace in Oyo State, Nigeria namely Oyo State Civil Service, Federal Secretariat, Ibadan, University of Ibadan, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. The staff of the establishments were clustered into the able-bodied and the physically challenged. The total numbers of the physically challenged from the four establishments were 175 and a random sampling technique was used to select 275 non-physically challenged employees from where ever a physically challenged person is selected. The supervisors of chosen samples were then contacted to respond to the questionnaires that elicit information about these employees. The selected respondents must have worked in the establishment for a minimum of one year.

The main instrument used for data collection is a questionnaire tagged "Employees' Workplace Performance, Commitment and Attendance Questionnaire (EWPCAQ)".

The questionnaire with four sub-sections was designed on a four-point rating format of very satisfied (4), satisfied (3), unsatisfied (2), and very unsatisfied (1).

Section A: Workers Performance Scale is a seven-item scale adapted from W.H.O (2002) "World Health Organization's Health and Performance Questionnaire (HPQ): Clinical Trials Baseline Version".

Section B: Job Commitment Scale is a nine-item scale adapted from Balfour and Wechsler (1996) "Organizational Commitment Antecedents and Outcomes in Public Organization".

Section C: Absenteeism Scale is a 5-item scale adapted from W.H.O, (2002) "World Health Organization Health and Performance Questionnaire (HPQ): Clinical Trials Baseline Version". Using the test-retest method, at an interval of two weeks on other employees that are not going to be included in the research study, the instrument yielded reliability value of 0.85.

In administering the questionnaires, supervisors (75 in number) of the respondents were asked to rate the selected respondents through the use of designed questionnaire. The retrieved questionnaires were analyzed using t-test at 95% level of confidence.

3.0 Result of findings

Ho 1. There is no significant difference in the performance of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.

The hypothesis was put to test, using t-test. The results of the test are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: t-test analysis showing the difference in the work performance of people with disability and those without disability

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std Error Mean	Df	Т	P
Physically challenged	175	21.3829	8.0399	0.6078		2	
Non- Physically challenged	275	21.2036	8.1116	0.4891	448	0.229	.819

From table 1 above, there is no significant difference in the work performance of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace ($t=0.229,\,P>0.05$). Though the mean value of (21.3829) for physically challenged person is slightly higher than (21.2036) for the non-physically challenged their work performance is not significantly different.

Ho 2. There is no significant difference in the job commitment of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.

Table 2: t-test analysis showing the difference in the job commitment of people with disability and those without disability

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std Error Mean	Df	T	P
Physically challenged	175	24.1371	9.1201	0.6894			
Non- Physically challenged	275	23.7745	9.2492	0.5577	448	0.408	.684

From table 2 above, there is no significant difference in the job commitment of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace. ($t=0.408,\,P>0.05$). Though the mean value of (24.1371) for physically challenged person is slightly higher than (23.7745) for the non-physically challenged their job commitment is not significantly different.

Ho 3. There is no significant difference in the absentee rates of people with disability and those without disability in the workplace.

Table 3: t-test analysis showing the difference in the absentee rates of people with disability and those without disability

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std Error Mean	Df	t	P
Physically challenged	175	13.4114	5.2041	0.3934			
Non- Physically challenged	275	13.2291	5.2083	0.3141	448	0.362	.717

From table 3 above, there is no significant difference in the absentee rates of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace ($t=0.362,\,P>0.05$). Though the mean value of (13.4114) for physically challenged person is slightly higher than (13.2291) for the non-physically challenged their absenteeism rates are not significantly different.

4.0 Discussion of findings

The myth that PCP have a higher absentee rates than employees without disability, or that individuals with disability are unable to meet performance standards, thus making them a bad employment risk are not real.

Findings from the study showed the positive aspect of employing people with disability. Findings showed that there is no significant difference in the performance of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace, there is no significant difference in the job commitment of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace and there is no significant difference in the absentee rates of physically challenged people and those that are non-physically challenged in the workplace.

The findings corroborate the findings of Kaletta, et. al (2012) while reporting Walgreen management analysis of 31 distinct locations on productivity rates of both employee with disabilities or without disability found that in 18 locations, the difference in productivity rates was statistically insignificant, in three locations, employees without disability were more productive; and in 10 locations, employees with a disability were more productive. The implication of Walgreen findings is that employees with or without disabilities are equally productive.

Furthermore, this research findings are in line with the findings of Calwell (2001) that having a job by physically challenged make them want to maintain it probably more than any other job seeker because it probably took them three times as much effort to get there (commitment to the job). Also, the result is in line with the finding of DuPont (1990) that 90% of employees with physical disabilities rated average or better in job performance compared to 95% for employees without disabilities. It is noted that disabled people are able to manage a very difficult life (Bagshaw, 2006) which they transfer to their work schedules, which gives rise to job commitment. The commitment of disabled persons is better seen from the rates of turnover. Walgreen analysis of employee turnover data from four locations over 3 years as reported by Kaletta, et. al (2012), indicated that the average turnover rate was significantly higher for employees without disability as compared to employees with a disability.

The implication is that employees with disabilities have lower turnover rates which are indications of commitment to workplace organization. Also, the finding of this research gave support to the finding of Kin Dong-gyoung, (2005) that staff turn-over is very low with disabled employees. The result also gives support to the finding of DuPont (1990) that employees with disabilities are not absent more than employees without disabilities. In fact the studies show that on the average, individuals with disabilities have better attendance rates than their non-disabled counterparts.

5.0 Role of Industrial Social Workers in the integration of physically challenged persons in the workplace

Studies indicate that the process of integration of people with disabilities into the labour market and the manner in which it is done are influenced by several factors, including the person's physical condition and motivation level, work availability, employers' willingness to modify the workplace according to the employee's needs (Davidovich, 2010). Therefore, the industrial social worker in line with the view of NSW, Education and Communities, (2012) should play advocacy role on behalf of physically challenged, train and educate both the physically challenged and management of workplace in the following ways:

Flexible work practices: Having a flexible working arrangement will offer different opportunities in meeting both the agency's work requirements and the particular needs of an employee with a disability. For example, altering the physically challenged persons' working hours by allowing additional breaks to overcome fatigue; allowing the physically challenged person to be absent during working hours for assessment or treatment in physiotherapy, or hospital appointments.

A practical example is the positive statement of Pauline, a physically challenged person in a research by Roulstone et.al. (2003) that "....if

I've got a hospital appointment, even though I only work ten hours they allow me go in that time and I don't have to pay the hours back.". Further example is allowing regular short breaks to assist people with diabetes and other illnesses which require periodic medication or rest periods.

- Access to the workplace: Access requirement should involve having direct and barrier-free access to workplace such as widening a doorway, building a ramp, fitting power-assisted doors, or providing a parking space near a wheelchair-accessible entrance or lift. For example, Sharon in Roulstone et.al (2003) stated thus: " I did have an occupational therapist come out and check desk heights, chairs, how the computer was situated, and she gave me advice and information on how to use things: foot rests and chairs, and how to place the computer"

 (Kin Dong-gyoung, 2005).
- Job design: This is adjustment by exchanging some tasks of a job for tasks of another position with the intent of focusing disable worker's energies on tasks that they are more suited. Some examples are exchanging telephone duties for filling duties for a hearing impaired person; reassigning some of the physically challenged person's duties to another person.
- Work area design: This altering the physical layout of the office or work site so as to provide unobstructed access to the physically challenged. For example, if an employee uses wheelchair, proper ways to enhance easy movement around the workplace should be provided. Furthermore, employers can lower or raise desks, relocate filling cabinets and adjust lighting.
- **Providing equipment:** Adjustments in equipment can help people with a disability perform their job with greater efficiency. For example, providing a tape recorder to take and leave messages for some physically or sight-impaired people, providing a specially adapted keyboard for a visually impaired person or someone with arthritis.

- Training and development: Adjustments should be made to provide access to development opportunities. If a person with disability is employed, the training to be given should be different from those of non-disabled persons. A better training strategy for disabled is needed to sharpen their skills. For example, a sign interpreter is needed for a person with hearing impairment, or audio notes for a visually impaired employee for successful training and skill development.
- Recruitment: In order not to short-change the physically challenged during recruitment, an employer is obliged to provide needed assistance. If an applicant has a disability that will require adjustment to the non-core requirements of the position, the selection committee (industrial social worker inclusive) should discuss feasible adjustments with the applicant. The selection committee's report should include details of any adjustments to the job discussed with a recommended applicant.

6.0 Recommendations

- 1. Management should help disabled workers realize their full potential in the workplace through career development, training, and flexible working conditions. This will ensure a fair and robust work environment for both able-bodied and disabled employees.
- 2. Employers Managers are required to make reasonable adjustments. This will enable the person with disability to use their skills effectively and contribute to the agency's performance and service delivery.

These can be to physical features of premises and/or arrangement for employing disabled people. The adjustment suggested include structural changes (such as widening doorway, building a ramp or fitting power-assisted doors); modify equipment (provision of specially adapted keyboard for visually impaired persons); provision of hearing assistance (for hearing impaired persons), allowance for absenteeism

to attend physiotherapy, therapy or hospital appointments, allowing disabled persons to work flexible hours to enable additional breaks to overcome fatigue.

- 3. The Equality and Human Rights Commission in their research and reported by Carvel (2008) stated that negative treatment at work may frustrate government policy by deterring people with disabilities from accessing or remaining in employment. Therefore, occupational social workers should work on supervisors, bosses and coworkers to divest them of biases and discrimination against the physically challenged.
- 4. There should be adequate training and guidance for managers who need the skills and confidence to manage disability in the workplace.

7.0 Conclusion

It should be noted that physically challenged people will not be assimilated into their societies, including the workplace, through the goodwill of the powerful or laws, they (physically challenged people) can and will change society/workplace through their increased participation, acceptance by co-workers, their skills, experience and insights.

Inclusive workplaces are mutually beneficial to employers and person with disabilities because becoming a disability-inclusive workplace is not about charity. Just is like the words of ILO (2010) that people with disabilities make good, dependable employees. They have comparable productivity, lower accident rates and higher job retention rates between employees with disabilities and a workplace general workforce. Hiring people with disabilities can contribute to the overall diversity, creativity and workplace morale and enhance a workplace's image among its staff, community and customers.

Finally, the workplace if well prepared for the integration of physically challenged employees will make the environment conducive for employees with and without disabilities work side by side, doing the

same jobs for the same pay based on the same standards. Their full integration into the workplace will not only reduce the cost of maintenance by the family and society but will also reduce the poverty within the economy.

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